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A
CHARGE

DELIVERED TO THE

CLERGY

OF THE

Archdeaconry of Cleveland,

At the Visitations held in the Year 1798.

By ROBERT PEIRSON, A. M. K

ARCHDEACON OF CLEVELAND.

Published at the particular request of the Clergy.

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REVEREND BRETHREN,

IT is a Maxim founded in Truth, that nothing becomes so instructive to the Nature of Man, as those wholesome Lessons which Experience daily reads to every one. We may form Theories, and deduce plain consequences from them, which satisfy us for a time, and seem well calculated to regulate our practice, in almost every occurrence of human Life. We may investigate general Causes, and ascertain Effects which naturally flow from those Causes, by reflecting on the ordinary operations of Providence, and the general tendency of all human actions. Yet it is evident, that, after our most accurate reasonings on any particular Subject, we want something more to convince us fully of the truth of such positions as we establish on sure grounds in the first instance. We want the aid of Experience to satisfy us of certain Effects which will invariably attach to any misguided or erroneous conduct.

WE

WE learn, for instance, both from Reason and Revelation, that the life of man is fleeting and uncertain;—that he was brought into existence to sojourn in this World only for a time;—and that his principal business was invariably to observe the Laws of his benevolent Creator, who has graciously promised to render him for ever happy in a future state, as the reward of his “patient continuance in well doing.” Yet until Experience, alafs! discovers “female softness bewailing the loss of a Brother, and friendship becoming a mourner at the Grave,” we seldom reflect seriously either on what we are, or what we must be.

WE know that no Society of Men,—no State or Kingdom can long subsist, unless it has been first formed in a deep sense of the common agency of Providence, and in a firm and constant reliance on its kind and protecting care. We are certain that even a private Individual cannot hope to share in the mutual advantages of Civil Society, without being governed by the Laws of subordination, regularity, and decorum.

HOWEVER

HOWEVER volatile the thoughts of man may be, even in their most correct state;—however erroneous his Judgment may be at the best, yet it seems strange that he should not be anxious at all times to promote his own general good and happiness:—that he should not be unremittingly attentive to the Laws of self-preservation and self-defence, which are so intimately interwoven with his nature. Strange it is, and yet still stranger, that he is only to be warned of his danger, in various instances, by dear-bought Experience, or by the power of fatal Example.

THE Complexion of the present Times is so gloomy and ill-favoured, that the minds of most men are filled with painful and anxious thoughts at the very moment, my Reverend Brethren, in which I now address you. We have lived to witness the overthrow of several powerful States, by the artifice of a cruel and rapacious Enemy,—evidently hostile to the general Peace of Europe. Dead to every sense of Religion,—of Virtue,—and of Honour;—hurried on by furious and unrestrained Passions, and apparently intent upon scourging the common race of men, they too much resemble

resemble a pestilential air, which breathes Destruction and Death.

IN the midst of this surrounding Conflict, when the fate of Empires is depending,—when the alarms of War, and the din of Arms have already pervaded the Continent of Europe, it cannot be wondered at if the welfare or existence of our own Country should be uppermost in our thoughts. We must naturally become anxious above measure, for the security of our property, and the safety of our persons. It might have been happier for us, perhaps, if we had listened earlier to experience, and derived instruction from example. We might, haply, have suffered less mortification from discovering that we have, alas! cherished secret Enemies in our own Country, who have been so far insensible of the blessings which they have long enjoyed under our happy Constitution both in Church and state, as at length to be induced to betray us to our open Enemies, or perhaps, for ought we know to the contrary, to reap some secret satisfaction or other, from beholding our Land deluged with Blood.

IT

It has always been the dire misfortune of Religion to share in public calamities, and to suffer deeply under national grievances. How truly painful must it be to a generous mind to reflect in this our day, that there is every reason to apprehend that the foundation of most of the Convulsions which have already shaken Kingdoms, has been laid in a gradual attack on the fundamental principles of the Christian faith and doctrine! Although this attack has been slow,—secret,—and specious; yet it has so far succeeded, alas! that the Religion of Jesus is now openly assailed on one hand, and disregarded on another. It is little more than half a century since the Disease first shewed itself. It is certainly now epidemical, and highly infectious. Infidelity has erected its baneful Standard, and thousands have flocked to it. Thousands, it is much to be feared, have renounced their Lord and Saviour, and thousands appear to “glory in his shame.”

WERE we to have been told, a few years ago, that those times of Ignorance, which the Almighty was once pleased graciously to “wink at,” were ever likely to return, we should

should hardly have credited the supposition. Were we to have heard it suggested that the same clouds of error which once enveloped the understandings of men before the “ Desire of all Nations” came to disperse them, should be again likely to overshadow the world, we should have rejected the suggestion as existing only in the chimera of a distempered imagination. Were we to have been told that the minds of men were likely to be poisoned a second time by that same kind of vain Philosophy and Deceit which existed after our Saviour’s appearance in the world;—and that the pride of man should again call forth his weak,—though boasted Reason, to assist him in taking offence at the Gospel of Christ,—in destroying Faith,—and in despising the simple and undisguised truths of the Christian doctrine, we should have stood amazed at ourselves, and been ready to have impeached our own understandings. We should doubtless, at that time, have expressed our utmost gratitude to God for the mercy of our Redemption,—we should have freely owned that man would have been for ever miserable without it,—that the Almighty—in the last instance of his goodness to his Creatures—had

“ sent

“sent his Son,”—and that, if men were foolish enough to reject his Gospel, there “remained no more Sacrifice for Sin.”

FAR be it from me, my Reverend Brethren, to suggest,—much less to forebode any apparent displeasure of the Almighty, for “who would be able to stand in his sight if he was angry?” Far be it from me, who am but dust and ashes, to presume upon the slightest limitation of his Mercy, which is infinite, and the Attribute in which he most delights. I receive comfort in my Life from a firm and well-grounded belief in Christ, and I am fully persuaded that my only hope of Salvation at the great day of Account, must entirely depend on his merits and mediation. But when it is considered that Sin originally “crucified the Lord of life,” by parity of reasoning, the same dreadful evil may again cause his “wounds to bleed afresh.” If Infidelity, and a falling away from the faith, as it was once delivered unto the saints, be characteristic of the present age, we must be presumptuous, indeed, to suppose that such proceedings can be pleasing in the Eyes of Heaven. The Almighty, you know, once
withdrew

withdrew the "light of his Countenance" from the City of Jerusalem; and as his Power and Wisdom are infinite,—as his "Councils are unsearchable and his ways past finding out," he may, if he pleases, punish our heinous Sins by a diminution of his favours. If we have abused his mercy, or refused to hear his voice, he may withhold from us his ordinary blessings for a time, in order to convince us that nothing but piety and virtue can ever continue to us his favour and protection; and that whatever chastisement he sees fit to inflict upon us, he always designs that it should terminate in some transcendent good to all his Creatures.

UNDER this view of the state of Christianity in the present age, it follows, that if the sacred duties of Religion are disregarded or neglected,—if we have unfortunately become "lovers of Pleasure, more than lovers of God;"—if numbers have gone so far as either to deny or controvert the fundamental principles of the Religion of Jesus,—and if divine laws are held in low esteem, we cannot so much wonder if the laws of Civil Government are considered as unsalutary. Although those laws

laws are only of human invention, yet they are wisely calculated to promote the welfare of every individual member of Civil Society. As soon, therefore, as men begin to neglect rules, they go on to despise them, and know not where to stop until all things are brought into confusion. They are hurried on, by furious and unrestrained passions, to commit every kind of excess without compunction. Their boasted Reason, which ought to act on all occasions as a skilful Pilot, is too often thrown off its guard by misguided Judgment, or by an heated Imagination. And then, as soon as the laws of Subordination are once set aside,—as soon as foolish men presume to do whatever seemeth good to them in their own Eyes, there is an end of order,—regularity,—and decorum; which are essentially necessary towards carrying on the designs, and promoting the mutual advantages of Civil Society.

FROM such an imprudent conduct, any Society will soon begin to labour under a complication of disorders, which will as certainly hasten its dissolution, as they constantly do that of any individual member of it. And without pretending to argue against the same tendency

tendency to change and decay, even in states and kingdoms, which, under the direction of Providence, is evident either in the animal or the vegetable World, yet we are assured from History,—nay we may learn from experience, that those Nations which have been most remarkable for wickedness, have sooner fallen a prey to their vices, than others. We daily see that man becomes his own destiny, and too often lends a ready hand to cut the thread of his own life.

HOWEVER applicable these scattered thoughts may be, my Reverend Brethren, to the present convulsed state of affairs in continental Empires, both in regard to Religion and Politics;—however the subversion of the one, or the wild enthusiasm of the other, may have infected the inhabitants of this Country, in some degree; yet happy is it for us, that we seem at present to have learnt from experience and example, that bad causes would soon produce similar effects, if they were not properly obviated. Happy it is for us, that we have become at last convinced that our national existence can only be preserved by the reverse of conduct which has proved so fatal to neighbouring

bouring Nations. I mean, by Religion and Virtue,—by Loyalty and Affection towards our lawful Sovereign,—by a proper respect for just and equal Laws,—by unanimity and concord among ourselves,—and by energetic exertions to repel the violence of our open Enemies who thirst after disturbing our peace, or preying upon the produce of our national Commerce, and the Industry of private Individuals.

THE futile doctrines of false and vain Philosophy have been most ably controverted and exposed by men of the first Learning and Integrity in this, or in any other Age or Country. And even in this AGE OF REASON, as it has been speciously stiled, we have lived to be satisfied that the novel notions of Liberty and Equality, are mere shadows without a substance;—that they have actually given rise to the very worst kind of Tyranny,—viz. to that Power which one man usurps in tyrannising over another;—and that they have effectually afforded to all, who have foolishly embraced them, the unhappy privilege of being more equally wretched.

WE

WE seem to be exposed at present to the rancorous hatred,—to the envious and ambitious views of a numerous Enemy. But let us not be borne down with fear or despondency. Even under the worst misfortunes incident to human Life, the goodness of God has so ordered it, that there shall always be some “balm in Gilead,—some Physician there.” Whenever his “Judgments are in the World,” he has enjoined us to “learn Righteousness,”—to “seek him while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near.” And if we are only true to him, and to ourselves, we may piously trust and hope that neither the “arrow that flieth at noon day, nor the pestilence that walketh in darkness,” will materially injure us. Gold has often been tried in the fire, and men of Virtue and Integrity in a state of adversity. Both have come out of the furnace, refined, and not debased. May the tender mercy of God grant, that this case may be more particularly our own!

CONSCIOUS, as we must all be, that even the best of men are frail and fallible, and that the human understanding is at all times limited

mitted and erroneous, there is yet every reason to hope that general good will always arise out of partial evil. The difficulties we are struggling with, will induce us to “think soberly, as men ought to think,” and to call out into action that generous principle of the human breast, which makes mankind open to conviction, and always ready to correct the frailties and infirmities of their nature, as much as possible.

THAT a general reformation of manners is absolutely necessary in the present times, thinking men of all descriptions are perfectly agreed. Little speculation will be necessary to discover that it must be begun by a strict and conscientious discharge of all our religious duties,—free from superstition on one hand, and enthusiasm on the other, and deduced from the purity and simplicity of the Gospel of Christ, which produces universal love and benevolence, through Faith in his merits and mediation. When we have once acquired a general habit of seriousness and devotion, we shall be enabled more easily to restrain our passions, and we shall learn to confine all our wants and wishes within the bounds of moderation. The reformation of every individual,

dual, would naturally and insensibly produce that general reformation which is so loudly called for. And those little imperfections in the form of our excellent Constitution, which numbers view with a microscopic Eye, and pretend to find fault with, would be found to have originated with ourselves only!

HENCE, my Reverend Brethren, we shall learn true wisdom, and pride ourselves on endeavouring to promote the future welfare of the Community at large, jointly with our own. We shall be induced, more and more, to reverence those Laws which secure to us true Liberty, and doubly studious to hand them down to our latest Posterity, strengthened by public Virtue, and not impaired by private indiscretion and folly. And when once Truth and Virtue shall be publicly encouraged and patronised by the World at large, we shall find by a pleasing, and one would fondly hope, by a long experience, that the upright and pious are the only wise and happy men.

F I N I S.





By the same Author.

1. A SERMON Preached at York, on Wednesday the 13th of April 1785, for the Benefit of the Lunatic Asylum. York, 4to, Price One Shilling.
2. A CHARGE delivered to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of Cleveland, at the Visitations held in the Year 1793. York, 4to, Price One Shilling.